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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: STATEMENT ON GEORGIA

¶1. Post is authorized to make the following statement at the February 5, 2009, meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna:

Begin Text:

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

The United States has noted with concern press reports that Russia plans to open three military bases in the Abkhaz region of Georgia. These steps, if confirmed, would be provocative and destabilizing, and would undercut international efforts through the Geneva talks to reduce tensions in the region. They also would compound Russia's breaches of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and deepen Russia's ongoing violations of the August 12 ceasefire agreement brokered by President Sarkozy, pursuant to which Russian forces are to withdraw to pre-conflict positions. These steps would also undercut international efforts in the Geneva Process to reduce tension in the region. We would appreciate any information the Russian delegation could give us on these reports, and would strongly urge Russia to reconsider its plans and avoid taking such unwise steps if in fact the reports are accurate.

Also of serious concern are reports of frequent Russian helicopter flights outside the South Ossetian region of Georgia. An OSCE spot report issued January 26 called attention to Russian helicopter flights into Georgian-controlled airspace clearly outside South Ossetia, and OSCE and EU monitors have noted several instances of Russian helicopters being observed above Georgian villages well outside the breakaway region. Such actions constitute further breaches of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and of the August 12 ceasefire.

These incidents clearly underscore the need for an OSCE monitoring presence with uninhibited access to the whole of Georgia, including South Ossetia. Continued kidnappings and killings of Georgian policemen and civilians demonstrate the same need. We remain convinced that now is the time for more) not less) international presence, to help deter violence, to ensure the safety and protection of civilians, to promote human rights, to encourage dialogue and reconciliation, and to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire and subsequent agreements. We continue to urge Russia to implement fully its commitments under these agreements, and say again that Russian forces should withdraw to pre-conflict positions.

Madam Chairwoman, the United States remains ready to work with the Chairmanship on a way to ensure a continued OSCE presence in Georgia. The United States will continue to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and will help in all ways to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.
CLINTON